

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 17, 2014

The Honorable Allison Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits
Veterans Benefits Administration
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Dear General Hickey,

We write today to accept your invitation to meet us at the Philadelphia regional office this month to discuss the allegations made at the July 14 Veterans Affairs Committee hearing.

The attached exhibits contain photographs that represent 96 boxes and 8 file cabinets full of unanswered military and returned mail. If accurately marked, it demonstrates that certain mail went unanswered for 3 years or more. The testimony of the whistleblowers is that this mail “disappeared” soon after its existence was brought to the attention of supervisors. It is suggested that the mail may have been shredded. At the hearing, the Inspector General testified that another 68 boxes of unanswered mail were recently discovered during an unannounced visit to the Philadelphia VA.

Only days ago, the VA office of the Inspector General released a report titled, “Review of Delayed Mail Mismanagement at the Baltimore VA Regional Office,” determined that 9,500 veterans documents and 80 claims folders were inappropriately stored.

A colleague from Oakland, CA recently revealed whistleblower reports of veterans correspondence going back more than a decade that were left unattended and unanswered. In a letter to his Representative, a worker disclosed he was given a special project to assess nearly 14,000 claims that had never been worked – some going back to 1994. In some cases, because veterans neglected to use a prescribed form, many pieces of correspondence were not deemed 930 Series “review claims.”

These incidents suggest a pattern of misconduct that could well extend not only within the Veterans Affairs Regional Office but indeed throughout the entirety of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

In advance of our meeting, we would like the following questions answered:

- The Inspector General has indicated that she found 68 boxes of unresponsive claims. The whistleblower contends that there were 96 boxes of unresponsive claims. How do you respond to the allegations that dozens of boxes and filing cabinets full of mail from veterans were hidden or destroyed, leaving veterans without vital information about the benefits they rely upon?

- Where is the mail pictured in the attached photographs, and what efforts are being undertaken to ensure that veterans that have sent these letters receive a prompt response?
- How many individuals at the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Regional Office received performance bonuses due to their contribution to lowering the backlog?
- What internal controls exist to ensure that mail from veterans is properly sorted and maintained, and that veterans receive a timely and accurate response from the VA? What additional controls have been implemented since you learned of the OIG report and the testimony of whistleblowers?

Please reach out to our offices to schedule a meeting at the Philadelphia Regional Office in July. Thank you and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Patrick Meehan
Member of Congress



Mike Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress